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ABSTRACT

Two phases of related research investigated the nature of women's skill development needs. The first phase examined prior schooling and current and future training needs of managerial and professional women. A questionnaire was administered to an initial sample of 163 and a replication sample of 207. Participants indicated interpersonal, managerial, and specific skills most frequently as areas of current and future training need. Findings suggested that professional and managerial women primarily seek training in a range of general skills that can be used across most white-collar occupations and allow adaptability within a changeable work environment as well as career maintenance and advancement. A second research stage with 130 managerial and professional women addressed three areas: comparison of levels of request for formal training with informal practical experience, learning opportunities for women as influenced by access to appropriate workplace support, and interpersonal training needs. Findings showed a relationship between experiential learning opportunities and priorities for interpersonal skill development. Results supported the hypothesis that women would have most demand for experientially learned skills. Most frequently requested interpersonal skills training was for conflict resolution, leadership, and counseling skills. (Contains 67 references.) (YLB)

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Women's Career Development: Barriers to Learning Within the Traditional Workplace

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ABSTRACT

Prior research suggests the learning needs of professional and managerial women are gender-typed due to women's unique experience of education and work. Schooling, current and future training needs were measured with a questionnaire administered to an initial sample of 163, and a replication sample of 207. Interpersonal, managerial and specific skills were most frequently indicated as areas of current and future training need. Findings suggest professional and managerial women primarily seek training in a range of general skills that can be used across most white-collar occupations, allow adaptability within a changeable work environment, as well as career maintenance and advancement. Further, priorities for training in certain skill areas vary over career stages. A second research phase with 130 managerial and professional women found a relationship between experiential learning opportunities and priorities for interpersonal skill development. Results supported the hypothesis that women would have most demand for experientially-learnt skills. Most frequently requested interpersonal skills training was for conflict resolution, leadership and counselling skills.

Continuous social, economic and technological advancements constantly redefine the nature of the labour market and attitudes towards work, with consequent influence on individual career patterns (Blakers, 1992; Poole, 1992; Ruff, 1983). In Western countries, these advancements are related to increasing breadth in work roles and an increased number of job and career transitions during many working lives (Beare and Millikan, 1988; Mayer Committee, 1992). For an individual to enter and perform competently within a transforming workforce, skills and knowledge that are transferable and relevant across career transitions become of increased importance. Lifelong learning of skills to maintain competence in a changing workplace and across transitions is important. Therefore, appropriate training is needed throughout an individual's career.

When considering education and training as a means to career competence it is important to consider that differential experience of work and education by men and women may differentiate important workplace competencies by gender (Hackett, Betz & Doty, 1985; Poole, Langan-Fox & Nielsen, forthcoming). Consequently, priorities for training, as a means to acquiring and maintaining competence may also be gender-typed.

Opportunities to learn skills at work may be less available to women than men. It has been argued that women receive minimal, delimited or non-advantageous work-related training in comparison to men (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; Giles, 1985; Walby, 1990; Weeks, 1992), and that such inadequate training limits career opportunities (e.g. Dillon, 1986; Sachs, 1992). Therefore, failure to identify training needs by gender may disadvantage women through overlooking their particular needs.

Two phases of related research were undertaken to investigate the nature of women's skill development needs. The first phase investigated prior schooling, current and future training needs of managerial and professional women. Investigation of three career stages allowed a career span perspective to training needs. Further, prior schooling and current training needs indicated training deficits and priorities. Future training needs provided insight into areas of ongoing training that could be incorporated into the workplace to maximise worker efficiency and allow career development. The second phase of research investigated the possibility that due to workplace constraints, learning priority would be for firsthand experiential learning compared to formal training. This second phase addressed three areas: (1) the comparison of levels of request for formal training with informal practical experience; (2) learning opportunities for women as influenced by access to appropriate workplace support, and; (3) interpersonal training needs.

Phase 1: Training Needs

Companies should be able to maintain economic competitiveness through training programs which enable their employees to acquire and maintain a competent level of skills and knowledge (Sonnenfeld & Ingols, 1986). Research confirms the view that individuals with adequate training for workforce participation are able to function more effectively than those without such training. For instance, Hunter (1986) found that job knowledge predicted job performance and suggested that the development of skills allows application and further development of workplace knowledge to improve work performance. An implicit assumption about competence is that its level is variable. Mechanisms for learning, including training and first-hand experience, can facilitate competence. The assumed value of training and workplace experiential learning is that they can increase the level of competent performance through the development of skills, knowledge and attributes. However to be utilised effectively, training must target appropriate skill areas.

From an economic rationalist approach, and more importantly in the interests of equity, it is appropriate

to ensure training maximises the competence of women. However, in order to do this it will be necessary to target the unique training needs of women in the workforce. This targeting of training needs concerns the influence of women's career experiences on their skill and training needs across career stages, gender-typed training needs, and an understanding of the nature of skill as it relates to competence.

Women and Training

Prior research suggests that women's career experiences, especially of the workplace and education, are different from the experiences of men. Lifestyle factors involving paid work, non-paid work and personal life options can differentiate career options and career choices for men and women (Astin, 1976, 1984; Gallos, 1989; Gilbert, 1985; Gutek & Larwood, 1987; McGowan & Hart, 1990). Gender-typed training needs may relate to different experiences of work by men and women (Poole, Langan-Fox & Nielsen, in press; Hackett, Betz & Doty, 1985). Two possible causes of this differential experience are constraints on women and gender-typed differences.

Constraints can restrict women's career and educational options. Examples of constraints include negative perceptions of job opportunities (Poole & Low, 1985), lack of partner support with domestic duties resulting in women needing to balance home and work duties (Findlay & Lawrence, 1981; Poole and Langan-Fox, in press), sexual inequality in the workforce (O'Donnell & Hall, 1988; Weeks,1992) and entrenched patriarchal structures (Walby, 1990). Further, male oriented definitions and competency lists both address the concept of employment as "paid" work, often overlooking or undervaluing domestic duties (Walby, 1990).

Major constraints on women in the workforce that may directly influence important work competencies include behavioural compromise by women and negative reactions from others.

Women must often make behavioural compromises to sustain a career. For instance, successful women often must face feelings of isolation from other women and vulnerability within their positions. Some successful women, due to social pressure, present a false image of their behaviour, often less feminine (Fisher, 1989) and possibly reducing its effective level in terms of competent performance. Women managers must often make compromises extrinsic to the workplace. For example, they are more likely to be single and childless than male managers (Tharenou & Conroy, 1988).

Negative reactions by others may also influence perceptions of competence. For example, characteristics of successful managers have been associated with men but not women (Schein, 1973; Heilman, Block, Martell & Simon, 1989). These findings support other research conclusions (e.g. Etaugh & Riley, 1983) that the characteristics of women tend to be evaluated negatively when breaking through stereotyped perceptions of their work role. Those women that do enter "non-traditional" career paths, they then face doubt from many men over their ability to perform competently within this non-traditional career (Stickel & Bonett, 1991).

Possible differences between men and women in terms of gender-typed strengths and weaknesses and characteristic behaviour may influence competencies.

Research has identified gender-typed strengths and weaknesses in skills. These may differentiate the competencies of men and women. For example, women have been rated as more competent in communication skills (Smith & DeWine, 1991). If so, women may be predisposed towards addressing demands from the workforce in a way that maximises use of their communication ability. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974), reviewing 1400 published studies suggested there was evidence for certain cognitive skill

differences: male superiority in mathematical and visual-spatial areas and female verbal superiority.

In regard to gender-typed characteristic behaviour, certain theories propose that women approach the workplace differently to men. For example, women may approach power differently to men, utilising it through interdependence and attachment rather than as a means of gaining independence (Bakan, 1966; Gallos, 1989; Gilligan, 1982).

Without recognising potential differences in gender approaches to the workforce two major problems may emerge. Firstly, the particular needs of women may be overlooked. Secondly, differing styles could be falsely perceived as incompetent and indecisive, when viewed against a 'male' model of workplace competencies.

Gender-Specific Training Needs

Hackett, Betz and Doty (1985) argued that it is important to recognise that there may be gender-specific training needs, and it was therefore important to allow the needs of women to be adequately assessed and expressed (Hackett, Betz & Doty, 1985). A failure to address differences in education, training and career experiences may have helped result in women's under representation in skilled occupations and the under-valuation of women's skills (Sachs, 1992). Many examples of under-representation exist because women are confined to a relatively narrow range of occupations (Bradley, 1993). Though percentages of female representation may vary between industrialised western countries, the theme of under-representation by women in management and professions is a commonality. Within Australia, comparable to U.S.A. and U.K. statistics, women occupy only 25.1% of managerial and 42% of professional positions (Women's Bureau, 1993). Overall, women are under-represented in science and mathematics fields and are restricted to more traditional fields such as humanities (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1988; Poole & Langan-Fox, in press). Women's careers tend to be restricted from skilled trade and technical areas (Dillon, 1986) and entry into trade and post-trade vocational sectors (Sachs, 1992). Compared to men, a larger percentage of women occupy lower paying, traditional and part-time work (Dillon, 1986; Poole & Langan-Fox, in press).

To identify women's training needs that may relate to perceptions of gender-typed constraints and compromises, it is important to first understand the nature of skills as they relates to training.

Skills and Training

Skills, knowledge and attributes are common terms used to describe an individual's competence. Competencies can be categorised into three conceptually separate categories: basic, general and specific components. The role of training in the workplace is often to improve these important workplace competencies to increase the effectiveness of the individual within their work role.

Basic components of competence, primarily referred to as basic skills, encompass elements such as reading, writing and simple mathematics. Debate exists about adequacy of basic skills preparation (basic language and mathematics) for the workforce. Despite debate about the effectiveness of basic skills preparation, it is generally considered that a certain level of basic competence is necessary for successful performance in white-collar employment.

General components of competence are those that are broad-based in application and are relevant to functioning within most white-collar workforce situations. An example is "interpersonal skills". General components are applicable to and transferable across most workplace situations. These are often regarded as a major necessity for the future as they allow job flexibility (e.g. Australian Education

Council Review Committee, 1991; Beare and Millikan, 1988). Previous research suggests that continuing training during a career is needed in general skills. For example, ongoing training was seen as necessary by women managers in general skills training and interpersonal (i.e. assertion and self-confidence) skills training (Davidson & Cooper, 1990) and time management, social and interpersonal skills (Funk, 1987).

Specific determinants are contextualised to particular job situations. They influence a person's suitability for a particular job or career and relate to expertise in a certain profession or job. Formal training and experiential learning can provide an individual with the specific knowledge, attributes and skills that allow them to achieve competence within a certain job or profession. Ongoing training of a specific nature is important as, with rapidly growing technology, skills are becoming quickly outdated. Mullins and Aldrich (1988) emphasise the importance of adequate training in specific technical skills.

Though so far non-determined, it is possible that a certain level of basic level competence is necessary before general and specific learning can successfully occur. It is also likely that a certain level of general (e.g. interpersonal skills) competence is necessary to augment specific skills and to allow their application within and across career stages and transitions.

Significance and Perspective

Significance.

Women face a specific set of constraints and possess a different approach to the workplace. Differential experience of the workplace may differentiate by gender what determines competence. Therefore, gender-typed training needs may emerge. Women may require training relevant to their own needs (Colwill & Vinnicombe, 1991). Greatest need may be in important general skills that address workplace demands. As an example, due to home-work conflicts constraining women, many women could benefit from training in developing strategies for balancing the home and work relationship, in turn improving opportunity for managerial advancement (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Tharenou & Conroy, 1988).

Perspective.

Self-reports of training needs provide a useful first-person insight into the training requirements and effectiveness of prior training for employees currently occupying professional and managerial positions. Such a perspective allows reflection upon prior training needs as well as consideration of possible future career motivations and directions when identifying possible future training needs. As 20 percent of women in the workforce occupy administrative, managerial and professional positions (Women's Bureau, 1993), the research is relevant to a large section of the workforce.

METHOD

Subjects

The study involved the use of an initial pilot sample of 163 professional and managerial women, then a replication sample of 207 professional and managerial women. Samples included volunteers from around Australia who agreed to participate after approaches to their professional organisations. The subjects in the pilot sample had a mean of 1.12 (S.D.=1.15) children. Sixty-four percent had completed secondary education, 40.5% a bachelor's degree and 17.2% a master's degree or higher. The subjects in the replication sample had a mean of 1.39 children, and 65.4 percent had completed secondary education, 60.1% a bachelor's degree and 13% a master's degree or PhD. The Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (Department of Employment and Industrial Relations and Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1986) was used to classify workers as professionals or managers. Forty-one percent of the subjects were classified as professionals, 59% were classified as managers. Individuals classified as 'managerial' made reference to being a 'manager' and supervised one or more people. Managers' skills were

commensurate with a 3-year degree and five or more years relevant experience. The professional group included those performing tasks requiring higher intellectual functioning and depth of understanding of a domain of knowledge. Professionals had undertaken post-secondary education and were involved in typical professional occupations.

Materials

Subjects completed a biographical questionnaire, containing four sections: family status, educational history, work history, and recent life history. Family status was assessed with three questions rating marital status, parental status and spouses' occupations if applicable. Educational history contained four sections, the first two demographic. The demographic questions assessed number of years of secondary schooling and academic qualifications. For the third item, subjects indicated up to four skills they would have liked further training in at school. A coding list was devised to rate these open responses, in terms of twelve skill areas: (1) basic (reading, writing, numeracy), (2) financial and management, (3) interpersonal, (4) vocational, (5) specific, (6) problem solving and analytical, (7) entrepreneurial thinking, (8) lifestyle, time and life management, (9) sporting, (10) general, (11) creativity and personal expressiveness, and (12) parenting.

The work history section contained four items. Two of these were demographic: an open-answer job description (coded using ASCO, 1986) and a job remuneration item. Remuneration was rated on an eight-point Likert scale from "less than $20 000" to "in excess of $100 000". The fifth and sixth items allowed subjects to list up to four types of training they would like to have (a) for current working life and (b) for future working life. These items were coded using the twelve categories from the "schooling" coding scheme.

Procedure

Subjects were mailed the questionnaires, and sent a follow up letter approximately two months later. The two separate samples were tested approximately one year apart.

RESULTS

Analytic Procedure

Analyses investigating frequency of training needs and perceptions of schooling were conducted on the pilot sample. Chi-squares were used to investigate any differences between proportioned frequency of response between the pilot and replication sample. Any differences were considered in terms of reliability and population characteristics.

Pilot Study

Frequency (and percentage) of response scores were calculated for each of the 12 coded categories accompanying the 'schooling', 'current' and' future' training needs items. Further

Further Schooling Needs.

Interpersonal skills (61.3% of subjects), vocational skills (32.5%), specific skills and knowledge (22.1%) and lifestyle management skills (20.9%) were most frequently requested as training areas in which subjects would have liked further schooling. Overall, these accounted for 67.8% of skills of all skills that further schooling could facilitate. Parenting skills (1.2% of subjects), basic skills (3.7%) and sporting skills (3.7%) were least frequently mentioned. Raw Frequencies and Percentages are presented in Table One for the twelve categories of skill for this schooling item, and also the current and future skills items.

Current Training Needs.

In response to the item - "What are your current training needs?" - interpersonal skills (60.7% of subjects), managerial skills (44.2%), and specific skills (37.4%) - were most frequent responses. Combined, these three categories accounted for 85.6% of all current training needs. Sporting skills (0.0%), parenting skills (0.0%) and basic skills (1.2%) were the least frequently requested of the twelve categories of training needed.

Future Training Needs.

In response to the item - "Are there any particular types of training or counselling which would help you in your future working life ?" - managerial skills (35.0% of subjects), interpersonal skills (32.5%) and specific skills (29.4%) were the most frequent responses. These accounted for 76.7% of all future training needs. Parenting skills, basic skills and sporting skills were least frequently requested of the twelve training categories.

Insert Table One About Here

Replication Study

To assess if there were any significant differences between the pilot and replication samples in the proportioned frequencies of response to the twelve skill categories for the three (schooling, current, future) training needs items, thirty six chi-squares were conducted. Significance on a particular chi-square indicated the proportion of subjects indicating that skill for either a schooling, current or future training need was significantly different for the pilot and replication samples. One of the thirty six chi-squares was significant. Proportionately fewer subjects in the second sample indicated further managerial training was needed in schooling ($X^2(df1) = 3.99$, $p. < 0.05$).

Eleven chi-square contingency tables were assessed to determine if there was a significant difference between the two samples in the proportioned frequency of response to the four-point Likert item: "In general do you think your schooling has made a direct beneficial contribution to your work history." None of the eleven chi-squares was significant. Therefore, each sample indicated the contribution of schooling to each of the eleven skill areas was the same.

DISCUSSION

Training Needs.

Interpersonal, management and specific skills were indicated as the greatest training need for professional and managerial women. Subjects indicated a high need for further training in interpersonal areas at school, and current and future training in interpersonal, managerial and specific areas. Three out of every five women wanted more emphasis on interpersonal skills in schooling and current training. Despite this, training for the workforce has tended to overlook these skill and knowledge areas. On the other hand, basic skill was rated as a low training priority though it is often strongly emphasised by employers as an area for priority in the development of competent workers.

Women indicated they required least additional training in basic, sporting and parenting skills at any time during their career. Parenting and sporting skills may not have been selected for two reasons: (1) both do not apply or only apply indirectly to most managerial and professional positions, and (2) the way these skills are developed may not be associated with workplace training but instead with lifestyle extrinsic to the workplace.

Further vocational training was needed at school by approximately one-third of both samples. Interest in

vocational training diminished post-schooling. Follow up qualitative research (Poole, Nielsen & Skoien, forthcoming) with 16 managerial women indicated that vocational guidance was considered most important from later schooling through early adulthood, while considering how to balance numerous lifestyle options including marriage, housework, career and leisure. Women who failed to gain vocational direction often indicated later regret at commencing a paid career too late or pursuing an incorrect career. A similar trend of the greatest training need being during schooling emerged with life management, problem solving and creativity and artistic skills training. Four possible reasons exist for this. Firstly, these general skills may be most important during the early stages of one's career. General skills allow adaptation and flexibility which may be required more in entry-level jobs and become less important as a stable career path emerges and specific skills and knowledge become of increased emphasis to match specific tasks and roles. Secondly, women with more established careers may have, or perceive themselves as having, acquired a level of competence in general skills and not feel the need for continued training. Thirdly, women may envisage their early career stage as a time of learning and their later career as a time of applying this learning, and thus during early career stages seek to develop themselves personally and socially through focusing on broad-based skills. Fourthly, women who requested these forms of training may feel that an absence of training in these skills had disadvantaged them from working in a field that interested them, and that their career path was too restricted.

Overall, professional and managerial women appear to seek training which develops general and broad-based skills that can be self-maintained and adapted. However, they recognise the need to develop managerial qualities and specific skills to adapt to their particular job, allowing development into or beyond their current role.

Emphasis in training needs to be given to general skills, in particular interpersonal, problem solving, vocational and lifestyle management skills. These skills are broad-based ones that allow for adaptability of the individual. Such skills are increasingly important due to the new move towards fluidity of careers due to technological, social and economic change. It is important that individuals maintain these skills to allow flexibility within the changing workplace. Specific skills training is also a priority. As specific skills concern the fine-tuning of an individual to a job, the onus of responsibility for such training and experiential opportunity rests predominantly with the employer and further education centres. Tertiary and continuing vocational education bodies may wish to consider the increasing importance of general skills training for a dynamic and competent labour force as future employees may increasingly need competence that can be transferred across workplace situations.

Support for Findings.

The two samples produced similar results despite being coded by different raters on different samples of people. This gives support to these figures as consistent ones describing patterns in the training needs of Australian managerial and professional women. A difference did exist between the two samples in the proportion of responses signifying additional managerial training needs during schooling. Two reasons could possibly explain this. Firstly, the two independent raters may have had different interpretations of open-ended responses that defined a managerial skill in the open-ended questions. Secondly, a higher proportion of the first sample may be directly involved in managerial work.

Recommended Future Studies.

Remuneration and age did not differentiate the training needs of subjects. Perhaps a future study could investigate the influence of other demographic variables such as sector of work, years at work, and desire for promotion or career change on training needs.

Future studies could investigate the relationship between career success and training opportunities that professional and managerial women were able to access. Rather than the training they need, how lack of training restricted them in their desired profession would be a focus for further research. Future studies could also investigate the differences between the training needs of men and women, to establish the extent to which the high percentage of request for skills training by women is a reflection of a generalised need for training, and the extent to which it is another example of women being overlooked in the workforce.

Phase Two: Women's Access to Firsthand Experience With Interpersonal Skill in the Workplace

Phase one identified interpersonal skill as a consistently high training need during schooling, currently and in the future. This generic determinant of competent performance has also been targeted as a competency important for future workforce effectiveness in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia (Mayer Committee, 1992, p.11). Prior research provides evidence supportive of the importance of social and interpersonal skill as a generic competency. For example, interpersonal skill has been identified: (1) by women in middle management as a major factor pertinent to success (Wentling, 1992); (2) by University graduates as the skill most important for career success (Allen & Scrams, 1991); (3) as the most important competency necessary to function in the new work environment (Ruff, 1983); (4) as the most important competency for trainers (Trimby, 1982); and (5) as important for work effectiveness (Roff-Steffen, 1991; Wilson, Wyn, Reeders & Woock, 1987).

Given the combined research evidence of the importance of interpersonal skills and a high training need for them, it is of concern that opportunities for women to learn these skills may be inadequate. Research by Larwood, Wood and Inderlied (1978) suggested women's careers are potentially disadvantaged by a lack of applied experience and formal training in work-related interpersonal activities.

Identification of women's particular interpersonal training needs and an investigation of whether interpersonal skill development needs relate to the ability to access experiential practical-learning activities in the development of the skill, would offer lacking insight into women's interpersonal competence and learning constraints.

Value of Training and Experience

Research supports the importance of both training and experience for the learning of further skills and knowledge that improve suitability for progression into higher occupational levels. For example, Gold and Pringle (1989) found approximately three-fifths of managers self-reported past training and work experience as significant in helping achieve promotion. It is likely that appropriate level experience with skills such as supervision and leadership are often prerequisite for higher positions where formal qualifications alone are not necessarily a sufficient condition for promotion.

Though both formal training and experiential learning are important for career progression, the importance of each for development of particular domains of skill has largely remained non-determined. The generation of an accurate measure of learning opportunities, differentiating learning opportunities based on their level of structure (i.e. formal training to informal experiential), is an under-researched field. Evans (1993) suggested that no simple dimension exists for relating formal and informal learning environments, with a general failure of research to address inter- and intra-contextual differences.

Though efficient polarisation of attributes of learning environments may not be currently feasible, evidence does support the existence of differences in the nature of learning obtained formally and informally. Experiential learning is distinct from formal learning and is conceptually linked with other learning processes and environments including experience, informal learning, real life context, workplace learning, deductive learning, reflective learning, incidental learning and situated-learning (e.g. Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Evans, 1993, Lave, 1977). Processes of experiential learning theorised as more readily available in the workplace than in formal learning settings include observation, modelling, coaching and fading, as well as social support (Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989; Evans, 1993; Lave, 1977). On the other hand formal learning can be conceptualised in relation to work extrinsic learning, decontextualised knowledge, generalisable knowledge, inductive learning, theoretical insight, intentional cognition and routinised learning (e.g. Evans, 1993; Marsick & Watkins, 1990; Resnick, 1987). Evans (1993) suggests there are failings in regard to both contexts of learning that could be reduced through a transference of learning techniques between each of the learning environments.

Despite being in an early stage of conception, the dichotomy of experiential and formal learning allows for consideration of which types or which components of skills are best developed in each of the two learning environments. Certain learning will occur best within a workplace-based experiential context and other learning best within a formal context. The workplace offers many experiential learning opportunities of advantage for development of situation-specific skills acquired through reflection upon participation in work events (e.g. leadership skills), while formal learning settings may favour skills most readily acquired through induction and acquisition of theory for the purpose of generalisation (e.g. writing skills). Such a dichotomy becomes of increased research significance if evidence suggests that access to both forms of learning (i.e. formal training and informal experience) is not necessarily gender-equitable, and may be disadvantaging women.

Learning Opportunities for Women

Difficulty in accessing training at work for many women implicates the importance of successful location and utilisation of work-extrinsic sources of skill development by women to maintain a satisfactory level of skills. Though formal training for women may not always be adequately supported by the workplace, an individual woman can still self-maintain formal skill development through utilising alternative learning places (e.g. universities, short courses, adult education). However, skills developed through workplace experiences are not so readily self-maintained. Opportunities for participation in experiences or tasks that facilitate skill development (e.g. supervision) are provided by others within the workplace. Support, primarily from higher-level staff members, is critical in the gaining of experiential opportunities.

Opportunities for first-hand experience can be accessed through mentor schemes, networks and supervisor support. These all open doorways to major ways to develop knowledge and skills (Nelson & Quick, 1985; Simpson, McCarrey & Edwards, 1987; Noe, 1988). These supporter-learner relationships are important for the development of personal capabilities, career advancement and for increasing understanding of organisational politics and workplace culture (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson & McKee, 1978: Burke, 1984; Reich, 1985).

Difficulties exist for women in accessing most forms of support that can lead to first-hand learning experiences. Women tend not to be mentored and to have difficulty networking for a number of reasons (Frank, 1988; Noe, 1988). Major reasons for difficulties in gaining support from senior staff may include: (1) negative perceptions of women's careers from traditional supervisors (Simpson, McCarrey & Edwards, 1987); (2) a domination of males in higher positions limiting access to appropriate role models and people willing to give support (Noe, 1988; Gold & Pringle, 1989; Goh, 1991); and (3) with career progression,

exclusions limit informal social relationships where many power transactions occur (Miller, Labovitz & Fry, 1975; Schein, 1978; Nelson & Quick, 1985). Further, Schein (1978) suggested superior's gender-stereotypes may negatively influence their evaluations of other women's capabilities related to competitiveness, managerial aggressiveness or forcefulness. Schein suggests they may therefore provide more opportunities to a man than to a woman to participate in experiential tasks using, and therefore further developing, these skills.

Women unable to locate adequate support are likely to experience difficulties accessing workplace-based learning opportunities and skill deficits may emerge. Therefore, it is possible that skills learnt primarily through experience may be a priority area of training need. As previously identified, learning of interpersonal skill is a major career need for women. Therefore it would be useful to investigate the relationship between the nature of learning of a skill and training needs for interpersonal skills.

Interpersonal Training Needs

"Interpersonal skills" is a broadly conceived terminology, useful as a general classification of skills that relate to personal interaction and inter-relation, yet when applied to research is effectively non-operational as the terminology describes a diversity of smaller sub-skills (e.g. conflict resolution, leadership skill). Investigations of training within this field typically need to further deconstruct this terminology into an operationalised subset of descriptors of interpersonal skill. As an example, Gurdham (1990) identified seven first-order interpersonal skills: interpreting other people's behaviour, presenting yourself, communicating, persuading, using power, working in groups and meetings, leading and facilitating groups and meetings. For another example, Smith and Montello (1992) operationalised four work contextualised interpersonal skill categories: physical attending, empathy, respect and concreteness.

Interpersonal ability can be facilitated through formal training or workplace experiences. Larwood, Wood and Inderlied (1978) suggested interpersonal training programs to increase career opportunities for women should provide elements of both formal training and practical experience.

Due to cultural and political peculiarities of the workplace, or *office politics*, emerging from workplace social structures and work processes, components of interpersonal skill may be contextualised, with skills appropriate for workplace interactions not necessarily encountered beyond work. Therefore, some interpersonal skill development may need to occur primarily within a workplace setting or be practical and applicable to such a setting. The more peculiar the skill to the world of work, the less transferable extrinsic formal training may be.

Aims and Hypotheses

If women have both difficulties gaining experiential learning opportunities and a strong priority for development of interpersonal skills which may have a large experiential learning component, it is in the interests of career equity to examine levels of interpersonal training opportunities available for women. A two step process applied in this research aimed to: (1) identify managerial and professional women's priority for different types of interpersonal skills training; and (2) compare the demand for skills primarily addressed through formal training with the demand for skills primarily learnt through first-hand experience with a task. It was hypothesised that women would have more demand for experientially learnt skills because women can overcome difficulties accessing formal training through self-directed and self-maintained learning, yet are reliant on often non-supportive others for experiential learning opportunities.

METHOD

Subjects: A subsample of one hundred and thirty managerial and professional, female subjects was randomly chosen from the first phase sample.

Materials: A questionnaire was developed to measure demographic background and self-perceptions of interpersonal training needs. Demographic items included age, education level and number of years in employment. Interpersonal training needs were assessed with the item: "In the area of interpersonal relations, what specific learning do you feel you could benefit from ?"
Open ended answers were content analysed and classified with a coding schedule utilising eight interpersonal skill categories: (a) conflict resolution, (b) counselling, (c) leadership, (d) verbal presentation (e) written presentation, (f) group facilitation, (g) personal management (e.g. time management) and (h) self-assertion. The coding schedule was developed following consideration of existing classification systems (e.g. Gurdham, 1990; Smith, White & Montello, 1992).

Procedure: Prior to an analysis of results, each of the eight skills was ranked by three experts as to how important accessing opportunities for experiential learning would be for the improvement of the workplace skills. This evaluation was based upon the comparative importance of experiential learning with other methods of learning. Skills that could easily be learnt through alternatives to experiential learning, through self-improvement or through formal channels that can be self-accessed (e.g. University) were scored lower than skills primarily developed through workplace experience. For example, self-assertion scored low because it involved intrapsychic factors and its development is mainly accessed through self-directed practice or formal counselling courses. On the other hand, leadership scored high, because although formal training can play a role in the development of this skill, to develop leadership capabilities for practical application in the workplace, first-hand experience was considered critical.

Mean rankings were calculated, and the four highest and lowest scores identified as 'experientially-learnt skills' (EL) and 'self-directed learning skills' (SD) respectively (See Table Two). Inter-rater reliability was significant ($p. < 0.05$). Self-assertion and self-management were rated as SDs as they could be self-maintained, while verbal and written expression could be developed through formal methods. However, the other four skills were rated EL due to the comparative importance of experiential learning opportunities in their development.

RESULTS

Percentage of subjects that requested each of the eight interpersonal skill categories, accompanied by their rating category, are presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2

A chi-square was conducted to determine any difference in mean proportioned frequency of response between the EL and SD categories. The EL categories were requested significantly more frequently than the SD categories as types of training need ($X^2(df = 1) = 31.6$, $p. < .001$).

DISCUSSION

Overall, conflict resolution, leadership and counselling skills were most frequently requested. Ninety percent of the women indicated a need for further improvement on at least one of these skills, with almost two-thirds requesting conflict resolution training alone. The four EL skills were in most demand, the four SD skills in least demand. Thus, skills developed more readily through self-improvement and self-access to formal training (e.g. universities, work courses) were requested least. These findings support

the initial hypothesis that women are not being provided with the appropriate experiences that provide the informal experiential skills important for advancement. However women appear to be addressing their own interpersonal skills development.

Experientially-learnt skills tended to be those that allow a person to manage inter-relationships within the workplace. The inability of more senior managerial and professional women to achieve the same level of development for these skills as for self-improved and self-accessed skills suggests workplace constraints may be in effect. However, it must also be considered that due to gender-typed socialisation, the self-efficacy of managerial and professional women may be lowest for tasks involving power and power-based interaction. As experiential learning may best suit development of such power-based interactive skills, such a pattern of efficacy in women would mirror the pattern of responses obtained.

Constraints inhibiting experiential-learning may relate to the extreme difficulty women often experience when attempting to move into the highest positions in organisations. It is possible that women can be legitimately denied advancement on the basis of inexperience, though in reality it is the workplace that denied them the opportunities that provide this experience. The intrinsic patriarchal nature of the workforce (Walby, 1990) may result in women being denied important opportunities allowing them to maintain and improve their skills. If so, issues of equity in career advancement arise.

If women are restricted from access to experiential learning, one possible method of addressing their training needs would be to attempt to integrate aspects of workplace learning that accommodate interpersonal skills training within formalised training programs. Cognitive apprenticeship, problem-based learning, action learning, reciprocal teaching and feedback processes (Evans, 1993) are all informal learning techniques that could be integrated into more formalised learning procedures.

Future research could provide further insight into the nature of learning within the workplace. Firstly, through a comparison of training needs for men and women. This would suggest gender-related constraints on women or an overlooked area of training for both men and women. Secondly, skills assessed could also be broadened beyond interpersonal skills. Thirdly, a measure of self-efficacy could be incorporated into the research methodology, to determine the comparative importance of self-efficacy and the importance of experiential learning in the self-reporting of skill development needs. Fourthly, future research could also benefit by utilising an alternative to expert ranking, such as self-reporting as a method of classifying the relevance of experiential-learning for individual skills.

Overall, this initial research suggested the importance of experiential learning in influencing the nature of training needs. The issue seems of sufficient significance to be considered in current training and workplace competency debates, together with concerns over equity in career opportunities for men and women.

Valuing Training and Competence

By considering training, competence and gender issues, questions arise as to the appropriateness of current conceptualisations of competence in a workforce which is often more accommodating to males. For all individuals, flexibility and change is needed to provide for changing priorities for leisure, domestic and workforce responsibility and activity. Further, to address women's particular needs, changes must occur in our approach to work to allow increased equity. Consequently, if the values of the workplace should change to be more accommodating to individuals in a changing society, what is valued as competent must necessarily change. It is important that policy-makers consider the appropriateness of

current values given to work in society, and how these values influence an individual's career paths and options. Educational policy and research will not address workforce needs simply by relating competence to traditional male-oriented perceptions of the role of work in society. Unless the value system is appropriate for all, to be inclusive of women, then any reform will be partial and inequitable.

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Table 1: Percentage of Response for the Pilot and Replication Study for Schooling, Current and Future Training Needs of Professional and Managerial Women

Skill Category	Stage of Training (Frequency)					
	Schooling		Current		Future	
	exp1	exp2	exp1	exp2	exp1	exp2
Basic	3.6	4.8	0.6	1.4	0.0	2.4
Managerial	14.1	5.3	44.2	25.6	35.0	21.3
Social/Interpersonal	61.3	41.5	60.7	56.0	33.7	30.9
Vocational	32.5	32.4	3.6	5.3	6.1	4.8
Specific	22.1	13.0	37.4	52.7	29.4	35.7
Problem-solving	11.1	8.7	2.5	2.4	1.8	1.4
Entrepreneurial	12.3	11.6	3.1	2.4	9.8	8.7
Life Management	20.1	17.9	8.6	3.9	6.1	2.4
Sporting	3.6	5.8	0.0	0.5	0.6	0.0
General	8.0	6.8	3.6	1.4	1.8	1.0
Creativity/Artistic	11.0	14.0	3.1	2.4	1.8	3.9
Parenting	1.2	3.9	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.5

Table 2: Frequency of Response for Interpersonal Training Categories

Interpersonal Training Need		Percentage of Response	Rating
1.	Conflict Resolution	63.6	EL
2.	Leadership	48.8	EL
3.	Counselling	38.0	EL
4.	Group Facilitation	29.5	EL
5.	Verbal Presentation	21.7	SD
6.	Written Presentation	20.2	SD
7.	Self Management	10.1	SD
8.	Self Assertiveness	5.4	SD